

A New Citizen Becomes A Proud Marine
Judith Bernstein-Baker, Esq., and Vleidmy Velarde-Duffy
HIAS Pennsylvania

“I cannot believe that finally I can show that I am a U.S. citizen, as I always felt like one. Joining the U.S Marines was one of the first things I did when I obtained my U.S. passport.”

Andres was born in Colombia in 1992 to Columbian mother and a father who was a U.S. citizen. Under U.S. Immigration law, this makes Andres a U.S. citizen as well, but it took the hard work of a HIAS PA immigration attorney to make proof of citizenship a reality for this future member of the Marine Corp.

Until he was seven years old, Andres lived with his parents in Columbia. When his parents ended their relationship, Andres’ father returned to the US. A few years later, Andres’ parents reunited, and his father sponsored Andres and his mother to come to the U.S. Andres’ parents got married and filed for permanent residence. However, tragedy struck the family when Andres’ father died suddenly in 2005. Under the law at that time, the father’s death meant Andres’ mother no longer had a sponsor, and she became undocumented and subject to deportation.

Desperate for help, Andres’ mother sought assistance from HIAS Pennsylvania in October of 2008. When HIAS PA Immigration Specialist Vleidmy Velarde-Duffy realized that Andres was a U.S. citizen because of his father, she started the arduous process of collecting evidence to prove it.

Early in 2009, Andres applied for a US passport. After submitting to a DNA test—another phase of proving his citizenship Andres could not have accomplished without the help of HIAS PA—on December 3, 2009 Andres’ US passport application was approved.

Despite this success, Andres and his mother were still in a very stressful situation—Andres’ mother was still facing removal or deportation. Luckily, right before she faced an Immigration Court hearing in March 2010, President Obama signed a law making the spouses of deceased US citizens eligible for legalization. Andres’ mother became eligible to receive a “green card” and had her removal proceedings terminated. Because of the work of HIAS attorney Vleidmy Velarde-Duffy, this deserving family’s unity has been preserved.

Because of his love for America, Andres decided to become a Marine. He is currently working, is an “A” student, bought his first car, and has signed a contract with the US Marines. After he graduates from high school, Andres will join the Marines in the fall. Andres’s mother has now obtained her permanent resident status and both mother and son look forward to their lives as American citizens.

Andres explains, “I really never understood the severity of my case until I had to go to Immigration Court. I was scared I would be deported. I could not understand why it was so difficult to prove my citizenship. Now I am very happy, relieved and sometimes I look back and I cannot believe that finally I can show that I am a U.S. citizen, as I always felt like one. Joining

the U.S Marines was one of the first things I did as soon as I obtained my U.S. passport”. His mother reflected, “Andres’ father, Laureano will now be at peace knowing our son is a U.S. citizen. Luareano tried to prove Andres’ citizenship several times while he was alive and was unsuccessful; we finally received the help we needed from HIAS Pennsylvania. Andres can now pursue his dream to join the U.S. Marine Corps. I am very proud of my son”.